

spinning was absolutely compulsory if everyone was to be garmented and protected from freezing, dire necessity was the motor which drove all the treadles on all the spinning wheels, and virtue an expected by-product. As there was no elegance in the vicinity of the early Pennsylvania German settlers with which to contrast it, even the connotation of "coarse" and "plain" had no meaning at that time. For no matter how coarse or how plain a piece of woven textile, the most unremitting labor was required to produce it, from the moment of the sowing of the flaxseed in the basic material, the fertile earth, to the time it was taken off the loom, a finished piece of fabric.

Day in, day out, spinning went on interminably, an occupation followed when other work had slackened. At such times, from Monday to Friday, every member of the family might be employed at the wheels, for no one ever had too much yarn made up in advance. Sturdy as were the fabrics woven by the early settlers, hard work wore out garments, which had then to be replaced; increases in the size of families demanded more and more materials; and when some members grew up, married and left home, as part of their dowries they took with them a share of the family weaving to start them off until they could themselves continue the relentless cycle. A Pennsylvania German farmer in the eighteenth century described his family, with what was undoubtedly a faint touch of boasting, as consisting of "three sons and eight daughters, five are able to turn the Spinning Wheel and throw the Shuttle." But his hearers felt that compulsion nudged the elbows of his pride, for they all knew how utterly dependent they were on the dainty flax plant. Until they found the time to rid the woodlands of the wild animals that made the raising of sheep almost too difficult, flax was their only textile crop, and many hands were the power that turned it into fabric.

Today it is impossible to visualize the amount of hard work necessary to reduce the flax plant to even the state of a workable fibre, which could then be spun. No modern weaver seated pensively at her loom, turning out "hand-loomed" fabrics, would produce a single inch of it if she had first to take part in any of the operations of planting, harvesting, and changing the innocent, blue-flowered plant into a thread ready for weaving. Yet Pennsylvania German women assumed their share of even the agricultural processes.

These began in the early spring when, in late April, the flaxseed was sown in an area set aside for it, from one-half to three acres. So that the flax would have long, straight, unbranching stems when it reached its full height of two or three feet, it was seeded thickly. By June it was covered with a mass of lovely blue blossoms, furnishing a handsome contrast to the ripening fields of golden grain. The blossoms turned into seeds, the seeds ripened, the stalks became woody and hollow, and by July the flax could be harvested.

This operation was done entirely by hand, a hand free of even a sickle, for it was necessary to pull the plant up by the roots so that no possible inch of the precious fibre might be wasted. At some stage or other of the harvesting, all of the family participated,